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ABSTRACT

Although library literature reflects more than two decades of interest in collaborative planning between library media specialists and teachers, and although library media specialists are well-trained to perform in this capacity, there are still fewer examples of instructional partnerships than may be expected. However, commitment to the goal remains strong. This ERIC digest focuses on the research literature addressing these collaborative relationships, noting the results of a study by the Library Service Center of the Colorado State Library which offer the most recent support for library media specialists and teachers working collaboratively, as well as a significant number of prior studies that indicate a positive relationship between the library media program and academic achievement. Following a definition of collaboration, the roles of each partner and the benefits, conditions favorable to collaborative partnerships are outlined in terms of administrative and interpersonal factors. (Contains 25 references.) (AEF)

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Teachers and Librarians: Collaborative Relationships

By Shayne Russell

Since the early 1980s, library literature has examined progress toward establishing successful collaborative relationships between classroom teachers and library media specialists. In 1989, Berkowitz and Eisenberg acknowledged the gap between the library media specialist's potential as a curriculum consultant in theory and in practice, noting that library media specialists' interest in being involved in curriculum dates back to the 1950s. Assignments developed in partnership between teachers and library media specialists are known to be more "authentic"—exhibiting a higher degree of meaning and significance (Gross & Kientz, 1999). When not guided in the use of a process, students tend to approach research as though there is only one right answer, and fail to learn how to use information to construct their own meaning (Kuhlthau, 1995). This ability to construct meaning is at the heart of information literacy, which collectively describes the skills students will need to cope in a complex world with access to an ever increasing wealth of information.

The results of a study by the Library Service Center of the Colorado State Library offer the most recent support for library media specialists and teachers working collaboratively. The study concludes that test scores increase as school librarians spend more time collaborating with and providing training to teachers, providing input into curricula, and managing information technology for the school (Manzo, 2000). A significant number of prior studies also indicate a positive relationship between the library media program and academic achievement. Didier (1984) examines 38 of these studies, including Gaver's (1963) study of the impact of elementary library service on test scores; Greve's (1974) research on the effect of library service on the academic achievement of high school seniors; and Snider's (1965) investigation of the relationship between college success and knowledge of information skills.

Collaboration Defined

Collaboration is based on shared goals, a shared vision, and a climate of trust and respect (Muronago & Harada, 1999). Each partner fulfills a carefully defined role; comprehensive planning is required; leadership, resources, risk, and control are shared; and the working relationship extends over a relatively long period of time (Callison, 1999). The teacher brings to the partnership knowledge of the strengths, weaknesses, attitudes and interests of the students, and of the content to be taught. The media specialist adds a thorough understanding of information skills and methods to integrate them, helping the teacher to develop resource-based units that broaden the use of resources and promote information literacy (Doiron & Davies, 1998). Additional benefits include more effective use of both resources and teaching time, integration of educational technologies, and a reduced teacher/student ratio (Doiron & Davies, 1998). Teachers with experience in collaborative planning and teaching view the role of the library media specialist more positively and welcome continued collaboration. Participants believe that the results of the collaboration are more powerful and significant than the results of their individual efforts (Friend & Cook, 1996).

Conditions Favorable to Collaborative Partnerships

Administrative Factors

Studies of successful collaborative partnerships have helped us to learn more about the factors conducive to this type of relationship. A recognized barrier to successful collaboration is lack of time (Bishop & Larimer, 1999). Library media specialists with flexible schedules are able to devote more time to planning and working with teachers (Callison, 1999). While media specialists on a fixed schedule spend up to five minutes planning with a teacher, a media specialist on a flexible schedule spends more than 30 minutes (Haycock, 1998). Media specialists with flexible schedules also develop four and one-half times as many integrated units of study than do those on fixed schedules, as well as teaching more information skills lessons integrated with classroom instruction (Tallman & van Deusen, 1994). Scheduling common planning time for teachers and media specialists also promotes collaboration. The greatest amount of collaboration occurs when the media specialist has a flexible schedule and team planning is encouraged by the principal (Tallman & van Deusen, 1994).

Several Canadian studies have shown that principals have a better understanding of the school library program and view it more positively than do classroom teachers (Oberg, 1995). Their critical role in promoting collaborative relationships goes beyond scheduling. Principal support includes working directly with teachers to develop their understanding of the role of the library. This is accomplished through staff inservices, featuring library activities in staff meetings, stating expectations of teachers regarding library use both during the hiring process and afterwards, and serving as a role model by effectively using the library and its information literacy program (Oberg, 1995). Administrators who ask how teachers are using the resources of the media center and the expertise of the library media specialist create an atmosphere where collaboration is more likely to occur (Bishop & Larimer, 1999).

Interpersonal Factors

Successful collaboration involves changing both the attitudes toward and expectations of the role of the library media specialist (Wolcott, 1996). Research shows that most students, teachers, and administrators don't perceive library media specialists and media centers as integral to their own success (Hartzell, 1997). Library media specialists are often viewed as storytellers and providers of resources rather than co-teachers who share common goals (Bishop & Larimer, 1999). It is up to the library media specialist to take steps to change this by serving on curriculum committees, attending planning meetings, and sharing ideas for integrating the media

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center into the curriculum (Bishop & Larimer, 1999).

Likewise, teachers need help to make the transition from independent teaching to collaboration. The library media specialist can help facilitate this change by acting as the change agent, innovator, opinion leader and/or monitor (Haycock, 1999). The qualities of a library media specialist most often mentioned in discussions of collaboration are initiative, confidence, communication skills, leadership qualities, and, above all, the willingness to take risks. Library media specialists must assume partnership and look for opportunities to plan with teachers, rather than waiting to be asked (Callison, 1999). Effective social skills are necessary to realizing the vision of collaboration set forth in *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (1998). Indeed, cognitive styles have been examined, and library media specialists defined as "field-dependent" were found to engage more frequently in collaborative efforts with classroom teachers regardless of time and resource limitations (Montgomery, 1991). Field-dependent library media specialists were characterized by their interest in people, use of others as a source of reinforcement, focus on socially-oriented subject matter, and preference for working with others. Less outgoing library media specialists should note that in the collaborative relationship, both leadership, and risk are shared.

Continued Commitment to the Goal

Haycock (1999) notes that collaborative program planning and team teaching are complex evolutionary changes which require time—perhaps two to five years—to reach effective levels. In the case of library media specialist/teacher collaboration, the transition has been slow. Although library literature reflects more than two decades of interest in collaborative planning, and library media specialists are well-trained to perform in this capacity, there are still fewer examples of instructional partnerships than might be expected (Haycock, 1999). However, commitment to the goal remains strong. The term "collaboration" is one of the most frequently used terms in *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (Callison, 1999). "Instructional consultant" has been upgraded to instructional and curriculum "partner," reflecting a collaborative relationship where the teacher and library media specialist are viewed as equal contributors (Muronago & Harada, 1999). The future of the library media program will be shaped by the vision for a student-centered library media program described in this revised document. This vision for the future is based on three central ideas which suggest a framework to support the authentic student learning that is the goal of the successful, student-centered library media program. These central ideas are *collaboration*, leadership, and technology.

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